



CATAWBA COUNTY

P.O. BOX 669 Newton, North Carolina 28658-0669 (828) 695-5600
FAX (828) 695-2497

Department of Social Services

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact: Dawn Hughey – 828-695-5601 or
dhughey@catawbacountync.gov

Lowes Foods of Catawba County are *Joining Hands* to Protect Children

Joining Hands, a project of the National Children's Alliance, aims to increase awareness of Children's Advocacy Centers across the country and to raise much needed funds at the local level. During the month of April, all five Lowes Food stores in Catawba County will invite shoppers to contribute \$1 for a "child's hand". All proceeds will go to support the Children's Advocacy Center of Catawba County.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Catawba County, founded in 1998, aims to minimize the trauma a child can suffer during a criminal child abuse investigation and expedite the prosecution of sex offenders. The Center offers a child friendly atmosphere where child victims of sexual abuse and/or severe physical abuse and their families can access a continuum of services and where child advocates and professionals can come together in order to maximize their efforts. To accomplish this mission, the Children's Advocacy Center partners with the District Attorney's office; the Sheriff's Department; the Hickory, Newton, Conover, and Longview Police Departments; Catawba County Child Protective Services; and medical and mental health providers.

Last year, the Children's Advocacy Center of Catawba County interviewed 174 children who were allegedly sexually and/or severely physically abused, 39% of these children were age five and under. At the Center, the child victim can tell his or her story in a safe, comforting, private environment, and all parties involved in the treatment and investigation are allowed to gather information needed from the victim without overwhelming the child. An on-site pediatrician is available to examine the victim and gather physical evidence of the alleged assault.

The Children's Advocacy Center of Catawba County is located in the historic Bolick House in Conover. The Center is a non-profit, fully tax-deductible agency supported by the Beaver Family Foundation, Smart Start, the Unifour Foundation, and the Catawba Valley Community Foundation.

For more information, contact Child Advocacy Center Director Deborah Johnson at 828-465-9296.